Alaric I

(c. 395 – c. 411)

BRIEFING

Alaric I (/ˈælərɪk/; Gothic: 𐌰𐌻𐌰𐍂𐌴𐌹𐍃, Alarīks lit.'ruler of all'; Latin: Alaricus; c. 370 – 411 AD) was the first king of the Visigoths, from 395 to 410. He rose to leadership of the Goths who came to occupy Moesia—territory acquired a couple of decades earlier by a combined force of Goths and Alans after the Battle of Adrianople.

Alaric began his career under the Gothic soldier Gainas and later joined the Roman army. Once an ally of Rome under the Roman emperor Theodosius, Alaric helped defeat the Franks and other allies of a would-be Roman usurper. Despite losing many thousands of his men, he received little recognition from Rome and left the Roman army disappointed. After the death of Theodosius and the disintegration of the Roman armies in 395, he is described as king of the Visigoths. As the leader of the only effective field force remaining in the Balkans, he sought Roman legitimacy, never quite achieving a position acceptable to himself or to the Roman authorities.

He operated mainly against the successive Western Roman regimes, and marched into Italy, where he died. He is responsible for the sack of Rome in 410; one of several notable events in the Western Roman Empire's eventual decline.

EARLY LIFE

According to Jordanes, a 6th-century Roman bureaucrat of Gothic origin—who later turned his hand to history—Alaric was born on Peuce Island at the mouth of the Danube Delta in present-day Romania and belonged to the noble Balti dynasty of the Thervingian Goths. There is no way to verify this claim. Historian Douglas Boin does not make such an unequivocal assessment about Alaric's Gothic heritage and instead claims he came from either the Thervingi or the Greuthung tribes.[5] When the Goths suffered setbacks against the Huns, they made a mass migration across the Danube, and fought a war with Rome. Alaric was probably a child during this period who grew up along Rome's periphery. Alaric's upbringing was shaped by living along the border of Roman territory in a region that the Romans viewed as a veritable "backwater"; some four centuries before, the Roman poet Ovid regarded the area along the Danube and Black Sea where Alaric was reared as a land of "barbarians", among "the most remote in the vast world."

Alaric's childhood in the Balkans, where the Goths had settled by way of an agreement with Theodosius, was spent in the company of veterans who had fought at the Battle of Adrianople in 378, during which they had annihilated much of the Eastern army and killed Emperor Valens. Imperial campaigns against the Visigoths were conducted until a treaty was reached in 382. This treaty was the first foedus on imperial Roman soil and required these semi-autonomous Germanic tribes—among whom Alaric was raised—to supply troops for the Roman army in exchange for peace, control of cultivatable land, and freedom from Roman direct administrative control. Correspondingly, there was hardly a region along the Roman frontier during Alaric's day without Gothic slaves and servants of one form or another. For several subsequent decades, many Goths like Alaric were "called up into regular units of the eastern field army" while others served as auxiliaries in campaigns led by Theodosius against the western usurpers Magnus Maximus and Eugenius.

RISE

A new phase in the relationship between the Goths and the empire resulted from the treaty signed in 382, as more and more Goths attained aristocratic rank from their service in the imperial army. Alaric began his military career under the Gothic soldier Gainas, and later joined the Roman army. He first appeared as leader of a mixed band of Goths and allied peoples, who invaded Thrace in 391 but were stopped by the half-Vandal, Roman general Stilicho. While the Roman poet Claudian belittled Alaric as "a little-known menace" terrorizing southern Thrace during this time, Alaric's abilities and forces were formidable enough to prevent the Roman emperor Theodosius from crossing the Hebrus River.

SERVICE UNDER THEODOSIUS I

By 392, Alaric had entered Roman military service, which coincided with a reduction of hostilities between Goths and Romans. In 394, he led a Gothic force that helped Emperor Theodosius defeat the Frankish usurper Arbogast—fighting at the behest of Eugenius—at the Battle of Frigidus. Despite sacrificing around 10,000 of his men, who had been victims of Theodosius' callous tactical decision to overwhelm the enemies' front lines using Gothic foederati, Alaric received little recognition from the emperor. Alaric was among the few who survived the protracted and bloody affair. Many Romans considered it their "gain" and a victory that so many Goths had died during the Battle of Frigidus River. Alaric biographer Douglas Boin (2020) posited that seeing ten thousand of his (Alaric's) dead kinsmen likely elicited questions about what kind of ruler Theodosius actually had been and whether remaining in direct Roman service was best for men like him. Refused the reward he expected, which included a promotion to the position of magister militum and command of regular Roman units, Alaric mutinied and began to march against Constantinople.[25]

On 17 January 395, Theodosius died of an illness, leaving his two young and incapable sons Arcadius and Honorius in Stilicho's guardianship.[26] Modern writers regard Alaric as king of the Visigoths from 395. According to historian Peter Heather, it is not entirely clear in the sources if Alaric rose to prominence at the time the Goths revolted following Theodosius's death, or if he had already risen within his tribe as early as the war against Eugenius. Whatever the circumstances, Jordanes recorded that the new king persuaded his people to "seek a kingdom by their own exertions rather than serve others in idleness."

RELATIONS WITH EASTERN ROME

Whether or not Alaric was a member of an ancient Germanic royal clan—as claimed by Jordanes and debated by historians—is less important than his emergence as a leader, the first of his kind since Fritigern. Theodosius's death left the Roman field armies collapsing and the Empire divided again between his two sons, one taking the eastern and the other the western portion of the Empire. Stilicho made himself master of the West and attempted to establish control in the East as well, and led an army into Greece. Alaric rebelled again. Historian Roger Collins points out that while the rivalries created by the two halves of the Empire vying for power worked to Alaric's advantage and that of his people, simply being called to authority by the Gothic people did not solve the practicalities of their needs for survival. He needed Roman authority in order to be supplied by Roman cities.

Alaric took his Gothic army on what Stilicho's propagandist Claudian described as a "pillaging campaign" that began first in the East. Historian Thomas Burns's interpretation is that Alaric and his men were recruited by Rufinus's Eastern regime in Constantinople, and sent to Thessaly to stave off Stilicho's threat. No battle took place. Alaric's forces made their way down to Athens and along the coast, where he sought to force a new peace upon the Romans. In 396, he marched through Thermopylae and sacked Athens, where archaeological evidence shows widespread damage to the city. Stilicho's propagandist Claudian accuses his troops of plundering for the next year or so as far south as the mountainous Peloponnese peninsula, and reports that only Stilicho's surprise attack with his western field army (having sailed from Italy) stemmed the plundering as he pushed Alaric's forces north into Epirus. Zosimus adds that Stilicho's troops destroyed and pillaged too, and let Alaric's men escape with their plunder.

Stilicho was forced to send some of his Eastern forces home. They went to Constantinople under the command of one Gainas, a Goth with a large Gothic following. On arrival, Gainas murdered Rufinus, and was appointed magister militum for Thrace by Eutropius, the new supreme minister and the only eunuch consul of Rome, who, Zosimus claims, controlled Arcadius "as if he were a sheep". A poem by Synesius advises Arcadius to display manliness and remove a "skin-clad savage" (probably referring to Alaric) from the councils of power and his barbarians from the Roman army. We do not know if Arcadius ever became aware of this advice, but it had no recorded effect.

Stilicho obtained a few more troops from the German frontier and continued to campaign indecisively against the Eastern empire; again he was opposed by Alaric and his men. During the next year, 397, Eutropius personally led his troops to victory over some Huns who were marauding in Asia Minor. With his position thus strengthened he declared Stilicho a public enemy, and he established Alaric as magister militum per Illyricum. Alaric thus acquired entitlement to gold and grain for his followers and negotiations were underway for a more permanent settlement. Stilicho's supporters in Milan were outraged at this seeming betrayal; meanwhile, Eutropius was celebrated in 398 by a parade through Constantinople for having achieved victory over the "wolves of the North". Alaric's people were relatively quiet for the next couple of years. In 399, Eutropius fell from power. The new Eastern regime now felt that they could dispense with Alaric's services and they nominally transferred Alaric's province to the West. This administrative change removed Alaric's Roman rank and his entitlement to legal provisioning for his men, leaving his army—the only significant force in the ravaged Balkans—as a problem for Stilicho.

THE REVOLT OF ALARIC

The revolt of Alaric I was a military conflict between the Roman Empire and a rebel army, probably composed mainly of Goths. This war consisted a number of armed conflicts in the period between 395 and 398, interspersed with periods of negotiations and sometimes even cooperation. During this war, the western and eastern parts of the Roman Empire did not always join together because of conflicting interests. The protagonists in this conflict were the West-Roman commander-in-chief Stilicho, the Eastern-Roman prefect Rufinus, his successor Eutropius and Alaric I. The latter was an elected Gothic military leader and monarch, and later considered one of first Visigothic kings.

The main contemporary sources in which this war is reported are the historian Orosius and the poet Claudianus. Other early sources are Zosimus, a historian who probably lived about half a century after Alaric's death, and Jordanes, a Romanized Goth who wrote a history of his people around 550. These sources provide a lot of information, but are not always unambiguous and sometimes even contradictory.

In 376 the Goths, who were fleeing for the Huns, were given permission from Emperor Valens (364-378) to settle within the Roman Empire. The Goths appeared in two large separate groups, the Tervingi and Greuthungi, each with their own leaders. These first two groups were soon followed by even more Gothic refugees. Emperor Valens who had a serious shortage of manpower for his armies saw in the newcomers a new source of soldiers and concluded treaties with the Goths. In exchange for military assistance, the Goths were assigned territory within the empire. This was an extraordinary circumstance, because for the first time in the history of the empire barbaric people were settled within its borders and not directly subjected to imperial laws. In the reception and integration of these groups, a lot went wrong due to mismanagement and miscommunication of the Romans. Over the next decades, more Gothic groups crossed the Roman borders; these generally tried to enlist with the Roman military or gain lands to settle. Many newcomers tried to integrate into Roman society, but other Gothic groups attempted to maintain cohesion as well as gain greater power in negotiations by practicing distinct customs including an elected kingship.

The arrival of the Goths and the inability of the Romans to overcome the threat that the newcomers made for the empire after some time, eventually led to a serious weakening of the military strength of the empire, and worked as a catalyst for the fall of the Western Roman empire in 476-480.

An important occasion in which the Goths had to provide the empire with soldiers, arose during the usurpation of Eugenius in the year 392. Emperor Theodosius (379-395) brought an army together in 393 that a significant contingent includes of Gothic auxiliary troops. These Goths were under the command of their own captains, of which Alaric was the most important. The supremacy over the empire was decided in 394 in the Battle of the Frigidus in favor of Theodosius. His Goths played an important role during the battles but also suffered major losses. The contemporary Roman historian Orosius stated that, since the Goths suffered most of the victims, Theodosius won two battles with Frigidus, one against Eugenius the other against the Goths.

Theodosius I died the year after the battle. His death on January 17, 395 caused the division of the empire among his two sons: the ten-year-old Honorius ruled over the western half and Arcadius, eighteen, over the eastern half. Due to the young age and low predisposition of both brothers, they were under the influence of prominent personalities. In the case of Honorius, the magister militum Stilicho and in that of Arcadius the Praefectus praetorio Rufinus.

There was a dispute between the two parts of the empire over the ownership of the prefecture of Illyricum. This prefecture was assigned to the west in 364 when the empire was divided between the brothers Valentinian and Valens. Later at the time of the war against the Goths in 379-382, the then emperor Gratianus handed it to Theodosius to facilitate his fight against the Goths. After the death of Theodosius, the western half demanded it back, something the eastern half rejected. The background of this dispute went beyond mere territorial importance, as the region was the empire's main recruitment area for soldiers.

The great losses suffered in the battle of the Frigidus fed the Goths' mistrust of the Romans. As Emperor Theodosius died in early 395, the Goths were ripe to revolt. The Goths had had enough of their semi-autonomous status within the empire and the Tervingi and Greuthungi sought rapprochement with each other. Now that the empire was divided between the two sons of the emperor, the Goths, who were settled as foederati in Moesia in the eastern part of the empire, were loyal to Arcadius. They demanded more security from him and chose Alaric, who had made a name for himself in an earlier, smaller uprising after the Maximus campaign - who also aspired to an important position within the Roman army - as their king. Though Alaric was a member of the Balt dynasty, a Gothic royal family, his relation to previous Gothic leaders like Athanaric remains unclear. In any case, he had distinguished himself as leader and gained the appointment as a Roman comes rei militaris, though he was evidently dissatisfied with this position. Alaric's personal grievance only grew when the emperor put him under the command of Gainas. The latter was also a Goth, but of lesser social origin than Alaric in the eyes of many Goths.

In the course of 395, a revolt of the Goths broke out in Moesia. As ancient sources remain vague as to the exact composition of the emerging rebel army, historians continue to dispute whether it was mainly recruited from Gothic settlers or composed of a mixed force of disgruntled veterans of the Frigidus campaign. Proponents of an ethnically mixed uprising point out that many armed, disgruntled groups were known to operate in the Balkans at the time, several of whom were either Roman or non-Gothic Barbarians. It would have made sense of these groups to unite due to their shared interest in land and compensation. Critics of this theory point out that, if the Goths were a minority in the rebellion, the rebels would have probably lost their Gothic identity over time; however, this was not the case. Historians such as Ian Hughes and Herwig Wolfram have instead argued that most of the insurgents were probably Goths, though ones of various backgrounds. As the rebel army then marched across the Roman Empire, it absorbed a great number of volunteers and stragglers of non-Gothic origin. However, these remained a minority, thus maintaining the self-identification of the rebels as "Goths". Hughes further posited that Jordanes' description of "Gothi Minores ('Lesser Goths')" in the Balkans suggests a division of the Goths in 395: A large number of Goths in Moesia revolted under Alaric, while the rest refused to join the uprising and thus became the Gothi Minores.

Once the rebels had gathered under the leadership of Alaric, they set off for the imperial capital Constantinople. In their wake they caused great damage, but encountering no significant opposition from the Roman army. The eastern field army was at a distance

in Asia Minor where it was engaged in fighting groups of plundering Huns and many eastern troops who had not yet returned after the campaign against Eutropius stayed in Italy. Nevertheless, at that time it was an impossible task for the Goths to take the capital of the East Roman Empire. The emperor stayed safely in his palace behind the strong walls. Alaric contacted Rufinus with whom he negotiated. After commitments from Rufinus, the Pretorian prefect of the East, and chief adviser to Arcadius, the siege of Constantinople was lifted and the Goths moved further west.

According to historian Thomas Burns, the negotiations with Rufinus meant that Alaric and his men were recruited by the Eastern regime of Rufinus in Constantinople and sent to Thessaly to ward off the imminent threat of Western General Stilicho. This general set out, with an army from Italy, to defeat the Gothic uprising in Greece.

Alaric's march in 395 included passing the mountain pass Thermopylae. His troops went to Athens and along the coast. Stilicho's propagandist Claudianus accused Alaric's army of looting carried out far south of the mountainous peninsula Peloponnese, reporting that only Stilicho's surprise attack with his western field army (that he had sailed from Italy) put an end to the looting when his forces drove Alaric's troops northward into Epirus. Zosimus adds that Stilicho's troops also destroyed and looted, and that he allowed Alaric's men to escape with their loot.

With the arrival of Stilicho in the fall of 395, the issue regarding the jurisdiction of the Illyrian prefecture became relevant. Rufinus, the strong man of the east, feared losing this area to the west with a victory of Stilicho over the Goths. He persuaded the emperor to cancel Stilicho's campaign. Emperor Arcadius forbade Stilicho to attack Alaric and demanded that Stilicho's army leave the territory of the Eastern Empire, because the emperor had not asked the Western Roman commander to intervene. In addition, the emperor demanded that Stilicho dismiss any Eastern Roman troops who were serving under his command at the time.

The imperial mandate arrived at the Roman camp when they were preparing an attack on the Goths in the valley of Pinios, an attack that had good prospects to suppress the Gothic uprising. Stilicho - whose wife and son were in Constantinople at the time - responded to this order, but not before he ordered Gainas (captain of the eastern troops) to kill Rufinus. Following the emperor's command, the western army left without even carrying out a combat action against the Goths and the eastern troops returned under the command of Gainas. Upon arrival in Constantinople on 27 November 395, Rufinus was assassinated when he and the emperor inspected the returned troops. His successor was Eutropius, who also had a major influence on the emperor. Zosimus claimed that Arcadius also checked Eutropius 'as if he were a sheep'.

Historian Roger Collins points out that although the rivalry created by the two halves of the empire, that fought for power, worked in the favor of Alaric and that of his people. However, this did not solve the problems of the Gothic people experienced in their food supply. Alaric needed access to Roman authority to be supplied by Roman cities. When he didn't get it, he gave himself access to this.

Alaric's army, now without the threat of Stilicho's army, stayed in southern Greece the following year (in 396) without the Eastern Roman government even doing anything against his raids. In the pass of Thermopylae, the Roman troops who were stationed here let the Goths pass without resistance. After this they entered the province Achaea. They plundered the cities of Boeotia and continued to Piraeus, where Athens surrendered and allowed Alaric to move into the city with his army. Then they continued with the fire treasures of Megara, Korinthian, Argos and Sparta. In the end, the new mentor of Emperor Arcadius, Eutropius turned to the west with a request for help. Stilicho seized this opportunity to intervene in the Eastern Empire with both hands.

Stilicho made his army ready, saved himself a difficult trip over land, and in the spring of 397 he put his troops by boat across the Adriatic Sea and landed in Corinth where the Gothic army of Alaric was located. After a first victorious confrontation, the Romans managed to circle the Gothic army camp, where they were at the mercy of their grace.

Nevertheless, Stilicho waited to hand out the final blow. He kept his power over Alaric as a trump card in the political slit-off between the two parts of the empire that arose when Stilicho decided to pressure the emperor to send Eutropius away and accept him as counsel. Arcadius (i.e. Eutropius) rejected this proposal and ordered Stilicho again to withdraw. This time he refused to follow up on this. The Roman general then was declared as 'public enemy' and all his belongings in the east were taken off of him. Faced with this rejection, Stilicho now chose the defeated Alaric as his new ally. Meanwhile, tensions between the two parts of the empire run up while Stilicho was informed that an uprising had broken out in the western part. In the province Africa the Gildonian uprising had broken out by the Comes Africae Gildo at the instigation of Eutropius. The grain supply of Rome was in danger and at the end of 397 the Roman general decided to return with his army.

Back in Italy, in 398, Stilicho sent an army of 5,000 veterans to Africa to suppress Gildo's uprising. Again he extracts a number of troops from the Rhine border and continued to campaign indecisively against the Eastern Empire. In doing so, he encountered opposition from the Gothic troops of Alaric.

After Stilicho let the Goths go, the Goths stayed in Epirus. Because the Eastern Empire did not have enough manpower to face them alone, the eastern half made a peace agreement with the Goths in 398. In doing so, the Eastern Empire made all kinds of commitments to the Goths and granted them better conditions and additional guarantees of local products. Alaric obtained the title of magister militum per Illyricum, which meant that he held the highest military rank in this province. They also agreed to the settlement of the Goths in the Illyricum prefecture which was disputed with Western Empire.[26] With the prefecture under his control, Alaric was able to impose the cities his will and plunder their arsenals so that he could deliver and improve the weapons of his troops.

This peace agreement was very negative for the western half, as they got the Goths as neighbors in the adjacent Illyricum. The Goths thus obtained a base from which they could easily invade the west. What actually happened from the year 401 and was the prelude to the Gothic War of 402-403.

FIRST INVASION OF ITALY

According to historian Michael Kulikowski, sometime in the spring of 402 Alaric decided to invade Italy, but no sources from antiquity indicate to what purpose. Burns suggests that Alaric was probably desperate for provisions. Using Claudian as his source, historian Guy Halsall reports that Alaric's attack actually began in late 401, but since Stilicho was in Raetia "dealing with frontier issues" the two did not first confront one another in Italy until 402. Alaric's entry into Italy followed the route identified in the poetry of Claudian, as he crossed the peninsula's Alpine frontier near the city of Aquileia. For a period of six to nine months, there were reports of Gothic attacks along the northern Italian roads, where Alaric was spotted by Roman townspeople. Along the route on Via Postumia, Alaric first encountered Stilicho.

Two battles were fought. The first was at Pollentia on Easter Sunday, where Stilicho (according to Claudian) achieved an impressive victory, taking Alaric's wife and children prisoner, and more significantly, seizing much of the treasure that Alaric had amassed over the previous five years' worth of plundering. Pursuing the retreating forces of Alaric, Stilicho offered to return the prisoners but was refused. The second battle was at Verona, where Alaric was defeated for a second time. Stilicho once again offered Alaric a truce and allowed him to withdraw from Italy. Kulikowski explains this confusing, if not outright conciliatory behavior by stating, "given Stilicho's cold war with Constantinople, it would have been foolish to destroy as biddable and violent a potential weapon as Alaric might well prove to be". Halsall's observations are similar, as he contends that the Roman general's "decision to permit Alaric's withdrawal into Pannonia makes sense if we see Alaric's force entering Stilicho's service, and Stilicho's victory being less total than Claudian would have us believe". Perhaps more revealing is a report from the Greek historian Zosimus—writing a half a century later—that indicates an agreement was concluded between Stilicho and Alaric in 405, which suggests Alaric being in "western service at that point", likely stemming from arrangements made back in 402. Between 404 and 405, Alaric remained in one of the four Pannonian provinces, from where he could "play East off against West while potentially threatening both".

Historian A.D. Lee observes, "Alaric's return to the north-west Balkans brought only temporary respite to Italy, for in 405 another substantial body of Goths and other barbarians, this time from outside the empire, crossed the middle Danube and advanced into northern Italy, where they plundered the countryside and besieged cities and towns" under their leader Radagaisus.[61] Although the imperial government was struggling to muster enough troops to contain these barbarian invasions, Stilicho managed to stifle the threat posed by the tribes under Radagaisus, when the latter split his forces into three separate groups. Stilicho cornered Radagaisus near Florence and starved the invaders into submission. Meanwhile, Alaric—bestowed with codicils of magister militum by Stilicho and now supplied by the West—awaited for one side or the other to incite him to action as Stilicho faced further difficulties from more barbarians.

GOTHIC WAR (401 - 403)

The Gothic War of 401–403 fought between the Western Roman Empire and the Visigoths. The commander of the Roman army was Flavius Stilicho, the Visigoths were led by Alaric. The war was fought in the north of Italy and, in addition to a number of small fights, consisted of two major battles, both of which were won by the Romans.

After the death of Emperor Theodosius I, the empire was split into a Western Roman Empire and an Eastern Roman Empire. It was not clear where the dividing line exactly lay. A problem arose when in 395 Alaric, a former general in the Roman army and king of the Visigoths, revolted and invaded Greece (Revolt of Alaric I). Stilicho, the commander-in-chief of the western armies, and shortly before his superior, wanted to drive him back, but was repulsed by the Eastern Authority, because he moved outside his territory.

After Stilicho was gone the Goths still were a threat for the Eastern Empire, and because they did not have enough manpower to face them alone, they came to a peace agreement with the Goths in 398. In doing so, the Eastern Empire made all kinds of commitments to the Goths. Alarik obtained the title of magister militum per Illyricum. which meant that he held the highest military rank in this province. They also agreed to the settlement of the Goths in the Illyricum prefecture which was disputed with the Western Empire.

It is unclear why Alaric moved west. The ancient sources do not indicate for what purpose Alaric invaded northern Italy. What is certain, is that the Gothic revolt of Tribigild, followed by the coup d'état of Gainas in the Eastern Roman Empire, turned to be unfavorable for the Goths in Illyricum. Gainas, commander-in-chief of the army and the new strongman, saw Alaric as a competitor. Taking advantage of his power, Gainas ordered the emperor Arcadius to renounce the services of Alaric and to cede the province of Illyricum, where the Visigoths stayed, to the West.

Due to this administrative change, Alaric lost his military rank of general and the right to legal provisions for his men. Gainas hoped to lose a dangerous opponent to the Western Empire with this. However Gainas was overthrown with the help of the Huns of Uldin, which may also has been a reason for Alaric to move west. Historian Thomas Burns suggests that Alaric was probably desperate for provisions to feed his army.

Using Claudianus as his source, historian Guy Halsall reports that Alaric's attack actually began in late 401, but since Stilicho was in Raetia "to settle border matters", the two only met for the first time in Italy in 402.

Stilicho had assembled a large army in northern Italy. With this army he planned in 401 to march against the Vandals and Alans, who posed a major threat to the Western Roman Empire. The Vandals and Alans themselves were hunted by the Huns and the border provinces Raetia and Noricum were in danger of being overrun by the drifting peoples. After Stilicho had completed his preparations, he marched with the imperial army to the North against the invaders.

Alaric took advantage of this troop movement by invading the Prefecture of Italia, which happened in the autumn of that year. Alaric's entry into Italy followed the route indicated in Claudian's poetry, when he crossed the Alpine border of the peninsula near the city of Aquileia. Over a period of six to nine months there were reports of Gothic attacks along the northern Italian roads, where Alaric was spotted by Roman travelers. Without encountering much resistance, he marched plundering to Mediolanum (Milan), where Emperor Honorius was staying. The emperor hastily fled from the rapid advance of the Goths, but did not get further than the city of Hasta, which was soon besieged by Alaric.

Stilicho stayed with the main force north of the Alps. The approaching winter prevented him from relieving the emperor. As soon as the Alpine passes permitted in March 402, Stilicho returned to Italy with a selected vanguard. Alaric first encountered Stilicho along the route over the Via Postumia. In doing so he forced Alaric to break the siege.

Two battles were fought. The first was at Pollentia on 4 April 402 (Easter Sunday), where Stilicho (according to Claudian) won an impressive victory by capturing Alaric's wife and children, and more importantly, by seizing much of the treasure take that Alaric had captured over the past five years. Stilicho pursued Alaric's retreating troops and offered to return the prisoners, but was refused. The second battle was at Verona, where Alaric was defeated for the second time.

Despite the defeat, Alaric was given a free retreat by Stilicho. Stilicho offered Alaric a truce and allowed him to withdraw from Italy. He was allowed to travel to Illyria with his remaining troops and even received financial support for food. Kulikowski explains this confusing, if not outright conciliatory behavior by stating: "given Stilicho's cold war with Constantinople, it would have been foolish to destroy a potential weapon as biddable and violent, as Alaric might later prove to be". Halsall's observations are similar, as he argues that the Roman general's "decision to allow Alaric's withdrawal to Pannonia makes sense when we see that Alaric's force falls into the service of Stilicho and that Stilicho's victory is less total than Claudianus us wants to make you believe". Perhaps more revealing is the account of the Greek historian Zosimus - who wrote half a century later: "which indicates that an agreement was made between Stilicho and Alaric in 405" - suggesting that Alaric was at that time in 'western service', probably as a result of an arrangement made in 402. Between 404 and 405, Alaric stayed in one of the four Pannonian provinces, from which he could "play East against West while potentially threatening both".

A direct consequence of this war was the relocation of the Emperor's residence to Ravenna. Milan, the city where Emperor Honorius stayed, turned out not to be so safe after all. Therefore, it was decided to move the court to Ravenna, a city surrounded by a swampy area. The only access was an artificial road, which could easily be defended if necessary. The Roman victory was initially received with joy by the population and Honorius went to Rome to celebrate the triumph in the company of his general.

According to historian A.D. Lee, Alaric's return to the northwestern Balkans brought Italy only a temporary reprieve, for a new war broke out when in 405 another Gothic tribe joined with other barbarians, this time from outside the empire, crossed the middle Danube and advanced into northern Italy, where they plundered the countryside and besieged towns and villages. This tribe was led by Radagaisus. Although the imperial government struggled to muster sufficient troops to contain these barbarian invasions, Stilicho managed to quell the tribal threat under Radagaisus when he split his forces into three separate groups. Stilicho cornered Radagaisus near Florence and starved the invaders into submission. Meanwhile, Alaric - who had been given the codicils of magister militum by Stilicho and was now being held by the West - waited delivered - on one side or the other to incite him to action, causing Stilicho to face difficulties from even more barbarians.

SECOND INVASION OF ITALY

Sometime in 406 and into 407, more large groups of barbarians, consisting primarily of Vandals, Sueves and Alans, crossed the Rhine into Gaul while about the same time a rebellion occurred in Britain. Under a common soldier named Constantine it spread to Gaul. Burdened by so many enemies, Stilicho's position was strained. During this crisis in 407, Alaric again marched on Italy, taking a position in Noricum (modern Austria), where he demanded a sum of 4,000 pounds of gold to buy off another full-scale invasion. The Roman Senate loathed the idea of supporting Alaric; Zosimus observed that one senator famously declaimed Non est ista pax, sed pactio servitutis ("This is not peace, but a pact of servitude"). Stilicho paid Alaric the 4,000 pounds of gold nevertheless. This agreement, sensible in view of the military situation, fatally weakened Stilicho's standing at Honorius's court. Twice Stilicho had allowed Alaric to escape his grasp, and Radagaisus had advanced all the way to the outskirts of Florence.

CROSSING OF THE RHINE

The crossing of the Rhine River by a mixed group of barbarians which included Vandals, Alans and Suebi is traditionally considered to have occurred on the last day of the year 406 (December 31, 406). The crossing transgressed one of the Late Roman Empire's most secure limites or boundaries; as such, it has been considered a climactic moment in the decline of the Empire. It initiated a wave of destruction of Roman cities and the collapse of Roman civic order in northern Gaul.

That, in turn, occasioned the rise of three usurpers in succession in the province of Britannia. Therefore, the crossing of the Rhine is a marker date in the Migration Period during which various Germanic tribes moved westward and southward from southern Scandinavia and northern Germania.

Several written accounts document the crossing, supplemented by the time line of Prosper of Aquitaine, which gives a firm date of 31 December 406 in his year-by-year chronicle: "In the sixth consulship of Arcadius and Probus, Vandals and Alans came into the Gauls, having crossed the Rhine, on the day before the kalends of January."

A letter by Saint Jerome, written from Bethlehem to a widow Geruchia and dated to the year 409, gives a long list of the barbarian tribes who had overrun all of Gaul at that time, including those who had crossed the Rhine: Quadi, Vandals, Sarmatians, Alans, Gepids, Herules, Saxons, Burgundians, Alemanni and, to the shame of the empire, Pannonians from within the empire itself. Jerome lists the cities now known as Mainz, Worms, Rheims, Amiens, Arras, Thérouanne, Tournai, Speyer and Strasbourg as having been pillaged.[note 1] Jerome's account is highly stylised and neither his list of peoples nor his list of cities can be taken at face value as they have sources in previous texts.

In his History of the Franks, the 6th-century historian Gregory of Tours embedded some short passages of a lost account by the 5th-century historian Renatus Profuturus Frigeridus of a war between the Vandals, Alans and Franks that took place in the neighbourhood of the Rhine around the time of the supposed crossing of the Rhine. This text, scholarly called the "Frigeridus fragment",[8] may provide some clues about the circumstances preceding the crossing. Olympiodorus of Thebes, a generally reliable contemporary historian, wrote an account of the crossing, of which only fragments have survived in quotations by Sozomen, Zosimus and Photius. Orosius mentioned the crossing in passing.

The initial gathering of barbarians on the east bank of the Rhine has been interpreted as a banding of refugees from the Huns[9] or the remnants of Radagaisus' defeated Goths, without direct evidence. Scholars such as Walter Goffart and Guy Halsall have argued instead that the barbarian groups crossed the Rhine not (so much) because they were fleeing away from the Huns, but seized the opportunity to plunder and settle in Gaul when the Roman garrisons on the Rhine frontier were weakened or withdrawn in order to protect Italy. Peter Heather (2009), on the other hand, argued that this hypothesis does not explain all the evidence, such as the fact that 'the vast majority of the invaders who emerged from the middle Danubian region between 405 and 408 had not been living there in the fourth century', and that the evidence for any Roman military withdrawal from the northwest at this time is weak; escaping 'the Hun-generated chaos and predation' was still a better explanation.

According to the Frigeridus fragment, there was a war between the Franks and the Vandals, in which the latter were losing. Frigeridus states that the Vandals lost around 20,000 warriors, including their king Godigisel, in these military engagements. When the Vandals' war situation was becoming desperate, the Alans (who he mistakenly labels Alamanni) came to the rescue of the Vandals, and the joint forces seem to have defeated the Franks in a decisive battle. Frigeridus does not mention a date nor a precise location for this battle; he only indicated that the Alan army 'turned away from the Rhine' in order to intervene in the Vandal–Frankish war, so it must have taken place some distance away from the river.

Despite this, and against contemporary military logic of staying in the winter quarters to await more favourable weather for their next campaign, Prosper claimed the Vandals and Alans crossed the Rhine in the middle of the winter, which MacDowall argues would only make sense if they were starving and desperate, and the lands they had just conquered from the Franks were insufficient to provide them with enough food for everyone.

Jerome mentions Mainz (Mogontiacum) first in his list of the cities devastated by the incursion. There was a Roman stone pillar bridge across the Rhine at Mainz called the Pons Ingeniosa at that time, and the Vandals may have been starving (given the fact that they crossed the Rhine in mid-winter) and therefore decided to raid Mainz in order to plunder its food supplies; this is why scholars such as MacDowall (2016) assume this to have been the location of the crossing of the Rhine. Worms (Vangionum) and Strasbourg (Argentoratum) are two other Roman cities on the Rhine reportedly sacked, so an initial traversal further to the south may seem equally plausible (if one is to assume that it was accompanied by plundering a city on the western bank, which isn't even necessary; these cities could have been pillaged any time between the 405/6 crossing and Jerome's 409 letter). There is no archaeological record of any early fifth century destruction in early fifth century Worms, casting doubt on the records of its sacking. On the other hand, the downstream river fortresses of Nijmegen (Noviomagus) and Cologne (Colonia) in the north were apparently left intact by the barbarians, as was Trier (Augusta Treverorum), situated a few days' march west of Mainz. As Jerome had lived in Trier until 370, it's very likely he would have reported it if the invaders had attacked his former hometown, but he makes no such mention.

A frozen Rhine, making the crossing easier, is not attested by any contemporary source, but was a plausible surmise made by 18th-century historian Edward Gibbon. Although many later writers have since mentioned a frozen Rhine as if it were a fact, for Gibbon himself it was merely a hypothesis ('in a season when the waters of the Rhine were most probably frozen') to help explain why the Vandals, Alans and Suebi were able to cross the Rhine into Gaul with such apparent ease. It is also possible that they used a Roman Rhine bridge, or that the migrating peoples simply used boats.

It is not clear why the Germanic bands crossing the Rhine apparently met no organised military resistance on the Roman side. A common hypothesis is that Roman general Stilicho may have depleted the garrisons on the Rhine border in 402 to face the Visigothic invasion of Alaric I in Italy. Goffart argued in favour of this hypothesis based on the writings of the poet Claudian (died c. 404), who knew Stilicho personally; the general supposedly entrusted the defence of the Rhine frontier to the Franks and Alamanni, who were Roman foederati, for the time being until the Goths had been driven out of Italy. Furthermore, he interpreted the Frigeridus fragment as showing the Franks being initially successful in preventing the Vandals from crossing the Rhine, but that they could no longer hold them back when the Alans joined the fray. However, Heather (2009) pointed out that the evidence for any Roman military withdrawal from the northwest at this time is weak.

A 2000 article by Michael Kulikowski, finding that in traditional historiography "the sequence of events bristles with technical difficulties", bypassed modern historians' accounts, which he found to have depended upon Gibbon and one another, and reanalysed the literary sources. His conclusion was that a date for the mid-winter crossing of the Rhine of 31 December 405 offers a more coherent chronology of events in Belgica, Gaul and Britannia. However, Kulikowski's dating theory, which is a revival of arguments that were put forward by Norman H. Baynes, was forcefully challenged by Anthony Birley.

Kulikowski outlined how 406 came to be selected. The sixth consulship of Arcadius, with Probus as co-consul, corresponds to 406. Prosper noted the invasion of Italy by Radagaisus as the prime event of the previous year, as well as his death, which actually occurred in 406, and he correctly assigned to the next year (407) the usurpation of Constantine III. "The three entries are linked, and together they tell a kind of story", Kulikowski observed. "Prosper was writing a chronicle, and the genre abhorred blank years. Since his chosen genre demanded an entry for each of three years, Prosper simply portioned out his sequence of events, one event to the year. He does the same thing elsewhere in the chronicle".

Kulikowski noted a contradiction between Prosper's date and the assertions made by a fragment of Olympiodorus of Thebes, Zosimus's New History (vi.3.1) and Orosius that the Rhine crossing and the presence of barbarians in Gaul provoked the usurpation of Marcus in Britannia: the latter occurred in the course of 406, thus preceded the 31 December 406 date, and therefore the Rhine crossing must have happened earlier. Kulikowski's proposed date of 31 December 405 places the acclamation of the first of the usurpers in Britannia, which was characterised as a fearful reaction to the barbarian presence in Gaul, after the crossing of the Rhine.

With the traditional date of 31 December 406 in mind, much has been made of the inaction of Stilicho, which is sometimes imputed to his strategy focussed on ambitions in Illyria. Kulikowski's date of 31 December 405 finds Stilicho fully occupied in Tuscia battling the forces of Radagaisus, who was not finally overcome (Battle of Faesulae) and executed until August 406.

According to bishop Hydatius of Aquae Flaviae, the barbarians crossed into Spain in September or October 409; little is known about the acts of the Vandals, Alans and Suevi in Gaul between the crossing of the Rhine and their invasion of Spain. Gregory of Tours only mentions that 'the Vandals left their own country and burst into the Gauls under king Gunderic. And when the Gauls had been thoroughly laid waste they made for the Spains. The Suebi, that is, Alamanni, following them, seized Gallaecia.' Based on Jerome's letter, Kulikowski argued that the Vandals, Alans and Suebi probably mostly stayed in northern Gaul until at least the spring of 409 (the earliest possible date of Jerome's letter), because almost all cities pillaged by the barbarians listed by Jerome were located in the north, and the southern city of Toulouse (Tolosa) had so far been able to repel the invaders, and they hadn't yet crossed into Spain.

RENEWED HOSTILIES

In the East, Arcadius died on 1 May 408 and was replaced by his son Theodosius II; Stilicho seems to have planned to march to Constantinople, and to install there a regime loyal to himself. He may also have intended to give Alaric a senior official position and send him against the rebels in Gaul. Before Stilicho could do so, while he was away at Ticinum at the head of a small detachment, a bloody coup against his supporters took place at Honorius's court. It was led by Honorius's minister, Olympius. Stilicho's small escort of Goths and Huns was commanded by a Goth, Sarus, whose Gothic troops massacred the Hun contingent in their sleep, and then withdrew towards the cities in which their own families were billeted. Stilicho ordered that Sarus's Goths should not be admitted, but, now without an army, he was forced to flee for sanctuary. Agents of Olympius promised Stilicho his life, but instead betrayed and killed him.

Alaric was again declared an enemy of the emperor. Olympius's men then massacred the families of the federate troops (as presumed supporters of Stilicho, although they had probably rebelled against him), and the troops defected en masse to Alaric. Many thousands of barbarian auxiliaries, along with their wives and children, joined Alaric in Noricum. The conspirators seem to have let their main army disintegrate and had no policy except hunting down supporters of Stilicho. Italy was left without effective indigenous defence forces thereafter.

As a declared 'enemy of the emperor', Alaric was denied the legitimacy that he needed to collect taxes and hold cities without large garrisons, which he could not afford to detach. He again offered to move his men, this time to Pannonia, in exchange for a modest sum of money and the modest title of Comes, but he was refused because Olympius's regime regarded him as a supporter of Stilicho.

FIRST SIEGE OF ROME

When Alaric was rebuffed, he led his force of around 30,000 men—many newly enlisted and understandably motivated—on a march toward Rome to avenge their murdered families. He moved across the Julian Alps into Italy, probably using the route and supplies arranged for him by Stilicho, bypassing the imperial court in Ravenna which was protected by widespread marshland and had a port, and in September 408 he menaced the city of Rome, imposing a strict blockade. No blood was shed this time; Alaric relied on hunger as his most powerful weapon. When the ambassadors of the Senate, entreating for peace, tried to intimidate him with hints of what the despairing citizens might accomplish, he laughed and gave his celebrated answer: "The thicker the hay, the easier mowed!" After much bargaining, the famine-stricken citizens agreed to pay a ransom of 5,000 pounds of gold, 30,000 pounds of silver, 4,000 silken tunics, 3,000 hides dyed scarlet, and 3,000 pounds of pepper. Alaric also recruited some 40,000 freed Gothic slaves. Thus ended Alaric's first siege of Rome.

FAILED AGREEMENTS

After having provisionally agreed to the terms offered by Alaric for lifting the blockade, Honorius recanted; historian A.D. Lee highlights that one of the points of contention for the emperor was Alaric's expectation of being named head of the Roman Army, a post Honorius was not prepared to grant to Alaric. When this title was not bestowed onto Alaric, he proceeded to not only "besiege Rome again in late 409, but also to proclaim a leading senator, Priscus Attalus, as a rival emperor, from whom Alaric then received the appointment" he desired. Meanwhile, Alaric's newly appointed "emperor" Attalus, who seems not to have understood the limits of his power or his dependence on Alaric, failed to take Alaric's advice and lost the grain supply in Africa to a pro-Honorian comes Africae, Heraclian. Then, sometime in 409, Attalus—accompanied by Alaric—marched on Ravenna and after receiving unprecedented terms and concessions from the legitimate emperor Honorius, refused him and instead demanded that Honorius be deposed and exiled. Fearing for his safety, Honorius made preparations to flee to Ravenna when ships carrying 4,000 troops arrived from Constantinople, restoring his resolve. Now that Honorius no longer felt the need to negotiate, Alaric (regretting his choice of puppet emperor) deposed Attalus, perhaps to re-open negotiations with Ravenna.

THIRD SIEGE OF ROME

Negotiations with Honorius might have succeeded had it not been for another intervention by Sarus, of the Amal family, and therefore a hereditary enemy of Alaric and his house. He attacked Alaric's men. Why Sarus, who had been in imperial service for years under Stilicho, acted at this moment remains a mystery, but Alaric interpreted this attack as directed by Ravenna and as bad faith from Honorius. No longer would negotiations suffice for Alaric, as his patience had reached its end, which led him to march on Rome for a third and final time.

On 24 August 410, Alaric and his forces began the sack of Rome, an assault that lasted three days. After hearing reports that Alaric had entered the city—possibly aided by Gothic slaves inside—there were reports that Emperor Honorius (safe in Ravenna) broke into "wailing and lamentation" but quickly calmed once "it was explained to him that it was the city of Rome that had met its end and not 'Roma'," his pet fowl. Writing from Bethlehem, St. Jerome (Letter 127.12, to the lady Principia) lamented: "A dreadful rumour reached us from the West. We heard that Rome was besieged, that the citizens were buying their safety with gold … The city which had taken the whole world was itself taken; nay, it fell by famine before it fell to the sword." Nonetheless, Christian writers also cited how Alaric ordered that anyone who took shelter in a Church was to be spared. When liturgical vessels were taken from the basilica of St. Peter and Alaric heard of this, he ordered them returned and had them ceremoniously restored in the church. If the account from the historian Orosius can be seen as accurate, there was even a celebratory recognition of Christian unity by way of a procession through the streets where Romans and barbarians alike "raised a hymn to God in public"; historian Edward James concludes that such stories are likely more political rhetoric of the "noble" barbarians than a reflection of historical reality.

According to historian Patrick Geary, Roman booty was not the focus of Alaric's sack of Rome; he came for needed food supplies. Historian Stephen Mitchell asserts that Alaric's followers seemed incapable of feeding themselves and relied on provisions "supplied by the Roman authorities." Whatever Alaric's intentions were cannot be known entirely, but Kulikowski certainly sees the issue of available treasure in a different light, writing that "For three days, Alaric's Goths sacked the city, stripping it of the wealth of centuries." The barbarian invaders were not gentle in their treatment of property as substantial damage was still evident into the sixth century. Certainly the Roman world was shaken by the fall of the Eternal City to barbarian invaders, but as Guy Halsall emphasizes, "Rome's fall had less striking political effects. Alaric, unable to treat with Honorius, remained in the political cold." Kulikowski sees the situation similarly, commenting:

> *But for Alaric the sack of Rome was an admission of defeat, a catastrophic failure. Everything he had hoped for, had fought for over the course of a decade and a half, went up in flames with the capital of the ancient world. Imperial office, a legitimate place for himself and his followers inside the empire, these were now forever out of reach. He might seize what he wanted, as he had seized Rome, but he would never be given it by right. The sack of Rome solved nothing and when the looting was over Alaric's men still had nowhere to live and fewer future prospects than ever before.*

Still, the importance of Alaric cannot be "overestimated" according to Halsall, since he had desired and obtained a Roman command even though he was a barbarian; his real misfortune was being caught between the rivalry of the Eastern and Western empires and their court intrigue. According to historian Peter Brown, when one compares Alaric with other barbarians, "he was almost an Elder Statesman." Nonetheless, Alaric's respect for Roman institutions as a former servant to its highest office did not stay his hand in violently sacking the city that had for centuries exemplified Roman glory, leaving behind physical destruction and social disruption, while Alaric took clerics and even the emperor's sister, Galla Placidia, with him when he left the city. Many other Italian communities beyond the city of Rome itself fell victim to the forces under Alaric, as Procopius (Wars 3.2.11–13) writing in the sixth century later relates:

> *For they destroyed all the cities which they captured, especially those south of the Ionian Gulf, so completely that nothing has been left to my time to know them by, unless, indeed, it might be one tower or gate or some such thing which chanced to remain. And they killed all the people, as many as came in their way, both old and young alike, sparing neither women nor children. Wherefore even up to the present time Italy is sparsely populated.*

Whether Alaric's forces wrought the level of destruction described by Procopius or not cannot be known, but evidence speaks to a significant population decrease, as the number of people on the food dole dropped from 800,000 in 408 to 500,000 by 419. Rome's fall to the barbarians was as much a psychological blow to the empire as anything else, since some Romans citizens saw the collapse as resulting from the conversion to Christianity, while Christian theologians like St.Augustine (writing City of God) responded in turn. Lamenting Rome's capture, famed Christian theologian Jerome, wrote how "day and night" he could not stop thinking of everyone's safety, and moreover, how Alaric had extinguished "the bright light of all the world." Some contemporary Christian observers even saw Alaric—a professed Christian—as God's wrath upon a still pagan Rome.

SACK OF ROME

The sack of Rome on 24 August 410 AD was undertaken by the Visigoths led by their king, Alaric. At that time, Rome was no longer the administrative capital of the Western Roman Empire, having been replaced in that position first by Mediolanum (now Milan) in 286 and then by Ravenna in 402. Nevertheless, the city of Rome retained a paramount position as "the eternal city" and a spiritual center of the Empire. This was the first time in almost 800 years that Rome had fallen to a foreign enemy, and the sack was a major shock to contemporaries, friends and foes of the Empire alike.

The sacking of 410 is seen as a major landmark in the fall of the Western Roman Empire. St. Jerome, living in Bethlehem, wrote: "the city which had taken the whole world was itself taken".

The Germanic tribes had undergone massive technological, social, and economic changes after four centuries of contact with the Roman Empire. From the first to fourth centuries, their populations, economic production, and tribal confederations grew, and their ability to conduct warfare increased to the point of challenging Rome.

The Goths, one of the Germanic tribes, had invaded the Roman Empire on and off since 238. But in the late 4th century, the Huns began to invade the lands of the Germanic tribes, and pushed many of them into the Roman Empire with greater fervor. In 376, the Huns forced many Therving Goths led by Fritigern and Alavivus to seek refuge in the Eastern Roman Empire. Soon after, starvation, high taxes, hatred from the Roman population, and governmental corruption turned the Goths against the empire.

The Goths rebelled and began looting and pillaging throughout the eastern Balkans. A Roman army, led by the Eastern Roman emperor Valens, marched to put them down. At the Battle of Adrianople in 378, Fritigern decisively defeated emperor Valens, who was killed in battle. Peace was eventually established in 382 when the new Eastern emperor, Theodosius I, signed a treaty with the Thervings, who would become known as the Visigoths. The treaty made the Visigoths subjects of the empire as foederati. They were allotted the northern part of the dioceses of Dacia and Thrace, and while the land remained under Roman sovereignty and the Visigoths were expected to provide military service, they were considered autonomous.

Fritigern died around 382. Possibly in 391, a Gothic chieftain named Alaric was declared king by a group of Visigoths, though the exact time this happened (Jordanes says Alaric was made king in 400 and Peter Heather says 395) and nature of this position are debated. He then led an invasion into Eastern Roman territory outside of the Goths' designated lands. Alaric was defeated by Theodosius and his general Flavius Stilicho in 392, who forced Alaric back into Roman vassalage.

In 394, Alaric led a force of Visigoths as part of Theodosius' army to invade the Western Roman Empire. At the Battle of the Frigidus, around half the Visigoths present died fighting the Western Roman army led by the usurper Eugenius and his general Arbogast. Theodosius won the battle, and although Alaric was given the title comes for his bravery, tensions between the Goths and Romans grew as it seemed the Roman generals had sought to weaken the Goths by making them bear the brunt of the fighting. Alaric was also enraged he had not been granted a higher office in the imperial administration.

When Theodosius died on 10 January 395, the Visigoths considered their 382 treaty with Rome to have ended. Alaric quickly led his warriors back to their lands in Moesia, gathered most of the federated Goths in the Danubian provinces under his leadership, and instantly rebelled, invading Thrace and approaching the Eastern Roman capital of Constantinople. The Huns, at the same moment, invaded Asia Minor.

The death of Theodosius had also wracked the political structure of the empire: Theodosius' sons, Honorius and Arcadius, were given the Western and Eastern empires, respectively, but they were young and needed guidance. A power struggle emerged between Stilicho, who claimed guardianship over both emperors but was still in the West with the army that had defeated Eugenius, and Rufinus, the praetorian prefect of the East, who took the guardianship of Arcadius in the Eastern capital of Constantinople. Stilicho claimed that Theodosius had awarded him with sole guardianship on the emperor's deathbed and claimed authority over the Eastern Empire as well as the West.

Rufinus negotiated with Alaric to get him to withdraw from Constantinople (perhaps by promising him lands in Thessaly). Whatever the case, Alaric marched away from Constantinople to Greece, looting the diocese of Macedonia.

Magister utriusque militiae Stilicho marched east at the head of a combined Western and Eastern Roman army out of Italy. Alaric fortified himself behind a circle of wagons on the plain of Larissa, in Thessaly, where Stilicho besieged him for several months, unwilling to seek battle. Eventually, Arcadius, under the apparent influence of those hostile to Stilicho, commanded him to leave Thessaly.

Stilicho obeyed the orders of his emperor by sending his Eastern troops to Constantinople and leading his Western ones back to Italy. The Eastern troops Stilicho had sent to Constantinople were led by a Goth named Gainas. When Rufinus met the soldiers, he was hacked to death in November 395. Whether that was done on the orders of Stilicho, or perhaps on those of Rufinus' replacement Eutropius, is unknown.

The withdrawal of Stilicho freed Alaric to pillage much of Greece, including Piraeus, Corinth, Argos, and Sparta. Athens was able to pay a ransom to avoid being sacked. It was only in 397 that Stilicho returned to Greece, having rebuilt his army with mainly barbarian allies and believing the eastern Roman government would now welcome his arrival.[30] After some fighting, Stilicho trapped and besieged Alaric at Pholoe. Then, once again, Stilicho retreated to Italy, and Alaric marched into Epirus.[32]

Why Stilicho once again failed to dispatch Alaric is a matter of contention. It has been suggested that Stilicho's mostly-barbarian army had been unreliable or that another order from Arcadius and the Eastern government forced his withdrawal.[30] Others suggest that Stilicho made an agreement with Alaric and betrayed the East. Whatever the case, Stilicho was declared a public enemy in the Eastern Empire the same year.

Alaric's rampage in Epirus was enough to make the eastern Roman government offer him terms in 398. They made Alaric magister militum per Illyricum, giving him the Roman command he wanted and giving him free rein to take what resources he needed, including armaments, in his assigned province. Stilicho, in the meantime, put down a rebellion in Africa in 399, which had been instigated by the eastern Roman empire, and married his daughter Maria to the 11-year-old Western emperor, Honorius, strengthening his grip on power in the West.

Aurelianus, the new praetorian prefect of the east after Eutropius' execution, stripped Alaric of his title to Illyricum in 400. Between 700 and 7,000 Gothic soldiers and their families were slaughtered in a riot at Constantinople on 12 July 400. Gainas, who at one point had been made magister militum, rebelled, but he was killed by the Huns under Uldin, who sent his head back to Constantinople as a gift.

With these events, particularly Rome's use of the feared Huns, and cut off from Roman officialdom, Alaric felt his position in the East was precarious. So, while Stilicho was busy fighting an invasion of Vandals and Alans in Rhaetia and Noricum, Alaric led his people into an invasion of Italy in 401, reaching it in November without encountering much resistance. The Goths captured a few unnamed cities and besieged the Western Roman capital Mediolanum.

Stilicho, now with Alan and Vandal federates in his army, relieved the siege, forcing a crossing at the Adda river. Alaric retreated to Pollentia. On Easter Sunday, 6 April 402, Stilicho launched a surprise attack which became the Battle of Pollentia. The battle ended in a draw, and Alaric fell back. After brief negotiations and maneuvers, the two forces clashed again at the Battle of Verona, where Alaric was defeated and besieged in a mountain fortress, taking heavy casualties.

At this point, a number of Goths in Alaric's army started deserting him, including Sarus, who went over to the Romans. Alaric and his army then withdrew to the borderlands next to Dalmatia and Pannonia. Honorius, fearful after the near capture of Mediolanum, moved the Western Roman capital to Ravenna, which was more defensible with its natural swamps and more escapable with its access to the sea. Moving the capital to Ravenna may have disconnected the Western court from events beyond the Alps towards a preoccupation with the defense of Italy, weakening the Western Empire as a whole.

In time, Alaric became an ally of Stilicho, agreeing to help claim the praetorian prefecture of Illyricum for the Western Empire. To that end, Stilicho named Alaric magister militum of Illyricum in 405. However, the Goth Radagaisus invaded Italy that same year, putting any such plans on hold. Stilicho and the Romans, reinforced by Alans, Goths under Sarus, and Huns under Uldin, managed to defeat Radagaisus in August 406, but only after the devastation of northern Italy. 12,000 of Radagaisus' Goths were pressed into Roman military service, and others were enslaved. So many were sold into slavery by the victorious Roman forces that slave prices temporarily collapsed.

Only in 407 did Stilicho turn his attention back to Illyricum, gathering a fleet to support Alaric's proposed invasion. But then the Rhine limes collapsed under the weight of hordes of Vandals, Suebi, and Alans who flooded into Gaul. The Roman population attacked there thus rose in rebellion under the usurper Constantine III. Stilicho reconciled with the Eastern Roman Empire in 408, and the Visigoths under Alaric had lost their value to Stilicho.

Alaric then invaded and took control of parts of Noricum and upper Pannonia in the spring of 408. He demanded 288,000 solidi (four thousand pounds of gold), and threatened to invade Italy if he did not get it. This was equivalent to the amount of money earned in property revenue by a single senatorial family in one year. Only with the greatest difficulty was Stilicho able to get the Roman Senate to agree to pay the ransom, which was to buy the Romans a new alliance with Alaric who was to go to Gaul and fight the usurper Constantine III. The debate on whether to pay Alaric weakened Stilicho's relationship with Honorius.

Before payment could be received, however, the Eastern Roman Emperor Arcadius died of illness on 1 May 408. He was succeeded by his young son, Theodosius II. Honorius wanted to go East to secure his nephew's succession, but Stilicho convinced him to stay and allow Stilicho himself to go instead.

Olympius, a palatine official and an enemy of Stilicho's, spread false rumors that Stilicho planned to place his own son Eucherius on the throne of the East, and many came to believe them. Roman soldiers mutinied and began killing officials who were known supporters of Stilicho. Stilicho's barbarian troops offered to attack the mutineers, but Stilicho forbade it. Stilicho instead went to Ravenna to meet with the Emperor to resolve the crisis.

Honorius, now believing the rumors of Stilicho's treason, ordered his arrest. Stilicho sought sanctuary in a church in Ravenna, but he was lured out with promises of safety. Stepping outside, he was arrested and told he was to be immediately executed on Honorius' orders. Stilicho refused to allow his followers to resist, and he was executed on 22 August 408. Stilicho's execution stopped the payment to Alaric and his Visigoths, who had received none of it.

The half-Vandal, half-Roman general is credited with keeping the Western Roman Empire from crumbling during his 13 years of rule, and his death would have profound repercussions for the West. His son Eucherius was executed shortly after in Rome.

Olympius was appointed magister officiorum and replaced Stilicho as the power behind the throne. His new government was strongly anti-Germanic and obsessed with purging any and all of Stilicho's former supporters. Roman soldiers began to

indiscriminately slaughter allied barbarian foederati soldiers and their families in Roman cities. Thousands of them fled Italy and sought refuge with Alaric in Noricum. Zosimus reports the number of refugees as 30,000, but Peter Heather and Thomas Burns believe that number is impossibly high. Heather argues that Zosimus had misread his source and that 30,000 is the total number of fighting-men under Alaric's command after the refugees joined Alaric.

Attempting to come to an agreement with Honorius, Alaric asked for hostages, gold, and permission to move to Pannonia, but Honorius refused. Alaric, aware of the weakened state of defenses in Italy, invaded in early October, six weeks after Stilicho's death. He also sent word of this news to his brother-in-law Ataulf asking him to join the invasion as soon as he was able with reinforcements.

Alaric and his Visigoths sacked Ariminum and other cities as they moved south. Alaric's march was unopposed and leisurely, as if they were going to a festival, according to Zosimus. Sarus and his band of Goths, still in Italy, remained neutral and aloof.

The city of Rome may have held as many as 800,000 people, making it the largest in the world at the time. The Goths under Alaric laid siege to the city in late 408. Panic swept through its streets, and there was an attempt to reinstate pagan rituals in the still religiously mixed city to ward off the Visigoths. Pope Innocent I even agreed to it, provided it be done in private. The pagan priests, however, said the sacrifices could only be done publicly in the Roman Forum, and the idea was abandoned.

Serena, the wife of the proscribed Stilicho and a cousin of emperor Honorius, was in the city and believed by the Roman populace, with little evidence, to be encouraging Alaric's invasion. Galla Placidia, the sister of the emperor Honorius, was also trapped in the city and gave her consent to the Roman Senate to execute Serena, who was then strangled to death.

Hopes of help from the Imperial government faded as the siege continued and Alaric took control of the Tiber River, which cut the supplies going into Rome. Grain was rationed to one-half and then one-third of its previous amount. Starvation and disease rapidly spread throughout the city, and rotting bodies were left unburied in the streets.

The Roman Senate then decided to send two envoys to Alaric. When the envoys boasted to him that the Roman people were trained to fight and ready for war, Alaric laughed at them and said, "The thickest grass is easier to cut than the thinnest." The envoys asked under what terms the siege could be lifted, and Alaric demanded all the gold and silver, household goods, and barbarian slaves in the city. One envoy asked what would be left to the citizens of Rome. Alaric replied, "Their lives."

Ultimately, the city was forced to give the Goths 5,000 pounds of gold, 30,000 pounds of silver, 4,000 silken tunics, 3,000 hides dyed scarlet, and 3,000 pounds of pepper in exchange for lifting the siege. The barbarian slaves fled to Alaric as well, swelling his ranks to about 40,000. Many of the barbarian slaves were probably Radagaisus' former followers.

To raise the needed money, Roman senators were to contribute according to their means. This led to corruption and abuse, and the sum came up short. The Romans then stripped down and melted pagan statues and shrines to make up the difference. Zosimus reports one such statue was of Virtus, and that when it was melted down to pay off barbarians it seemed "all that remained of the Roman valor and intrepidity was totally extinguished".

Honorius consented to the payment of the ransom, and with it the Visigoths lifted the siege and withdrew to Etruria in December 408.

In January 409, the Senate sent an embassy to the imperial court at Ravenna to encourage the Emperor to come to terms with the Goths, and to give Roman aristocratic children as hostages to the Goths as insurance. Alaric would then resume his alliance with the Roman Empire. Honorius, under the influence of Olympius, refused and called in five legions from Dalmatia, totaling six thousand men. They were to go to Rome and garrison the city, but their commander, a man named Valens, marched his men into Etruria, believing it cowardly to go around the Goths. He and his men were intercepted and attacked by Alaric's full force, and almost all were killed or captured. Only 100 managed to escape and reach Rome.

A second Senatorial embassy, this time including Pope Innocent I, was sent with Gothic guards to Honorius to plead with him to accept the Visigoths' demands. The imperial government also received word that Ataulf, Alaric's brother-in-law, had crossed the Julian Alps with his Goths into Italy with the intent of joining Alaric.

Honorius summoned together all available Roman forces in northern Italy. He placed 300 Huns of the imperial guard under the command of Olympius, and possibly the other forces as well, and ordered him to intercept Ataulf. They clashed near Pisa, and despite his force supposedly killing 1,100 Goths and losing only 17 of his own men, Olympius was forced to retreat back to Ravenna. Zosimus seems to imply that only the Huns under Olympius took part in this fight. Ataulf then joined Alaric.

This failure caused Olympius to fall from power and to flee for his life to Dalmatia. Jovius, the praetorian prefect of Italy, replaced Olympius as the power behind the throne and received the title of patrician. Jovius engineered a mutiny of soldiers in Ravenna who demanded the killing of magister utriusque militiae Turpilio and magister equitum Vigilantius; he had both men killed.

Jovius was a friend of Alaric's and had been a supporter of Stilicho, and thus the new government was open to negotiations. Alaric went to Ariminum to meet Jovius and present his demands. Alaric wanted yearly tribute in gold and grain, and lands in the provinces of Dalmatia, Noricum, and Venetia for his people. Jovius also wrote privately to Honorius, suggesting that if Alaric was offered the position of magister utriusque militiae, they could lessen Alaric's other demands. Honorius rejected the demand for a Roman office, and he sent an insulting letter to Alaric, which was read out in the negotiations.

Infuriated, Alaric broke off negotiations, and Jovius returned to Ravenna to strengthen his relationship with the Emperor. Honorius was now firmly committed to war, and Jovius swore on the Emperor's head never to make peace with Alaric.

Alaric himself soon changed his mind when he heard Honorius was attempting to recruit 10,000 Huns to fight the Goths. He gathered a group of Roman bishops and sent them to Honorius with his new terms. He no longer sought Roman office or tribute in gold. He now only requested lands in Noricum and as much grain as the Emperor found necessary. Historian Olympiodorus the Younger,

writing many years later, considered these terms extremely moderate and reasonable. But it was too late: Honorius' government, bound by oath and intent on war, rejected the offer. Alaric then marched on Rome. The 10,000 Huns never materialized.

Alaric took Portus and renewed the siege of Rome in late 409. Faced with the return of starvation and disease, the Senate met with Alaric. He demanded that they appoint one of their own as Emperor to rival Honorius, and he instigated the election of the elderly Priscus Attalus to that end, a pagan who permitted himself to be baptized. Alaric was then made magister utriusque militiae and his brother-in-law Ataulf was given the position comes domesticorum equitum in the new, rival government, and the siege was lifted.

Heraclian, governor of the food-rich province of Africa, remained loyal to Honorius. Attalus sent a Roman force to subdue him, refusing to send Gothic soldiers there as he was distrustful of their intentions. Attalus and Alaric then marched to Ravenna, forcing some cities in northern Italy to submit to Attalus.

Honorius, extremely fearful at this turn of events, sent Jovius and others to Attalus, pleading that they share the Western Empire. Attalus said he would only negotiate on Honorius' place of exile. Jovius, for his part, switched sides to Attalus and was named patrician by his new master. Jovius wanted to have Honorius mutilated as well (something that was to become common in the Eastern Empire), but Attalus rejected it.

Increasingly isolated and now in pure panic, Honorius was preparing to flee to Constantinople when 4,000 Eastern Roman soldiers appeared at Ravenna's docks to defend the city. Their arrival strengthened Honorius' resolve to await news of what had happened in Africa.

Heraclian had defeated Attalus' force and cut supplies to Rome, threatening another famine in the city. Alaric wanted to send Gothic soldiers to invade Africa and secure the province, but Attalus again refused, distrustful of the Visigoths' intentions for the province. Counseled by Jovius to do away with his puppet emperor, Alaric summoned Attalus to Ariminum and ceremonially stripped him of his imperial regalia and title in the summer of 410. Alaric then reopened negotiations with Honorius.

Honorius arranged for a meeting with Alaric about 12 kilometres outside of Ravenna. As Alaric waited at the meeting place, Sarus, who was a sworn enemy of Ataulf and now allied to Honorius, attacked Alaric and his men with a small Roman force. Peter Heather speculates Sarus had also lost the election for the kingship of the Goths to Alaric in the 390s.

Alaric survived the attack and, outraged at this treachery and frustrated by all the past failures at accommodation, gave up on negotiating with Honorius and headed back to Rome, which he besieged for the third and final time. On 24 August 410 the Visigoths entered Rome through its Salarian Gate, according to some opened by treachery, according to others by want of food, and pillaged the city for three days.

Many of the city's great buildings were ransacked, including the mausoleums of Augustus and Hadrian, in which many emperors of the past were buried; the ashes of the urns in both tombs were scattered. Any and all moveable goods were stolen all over the city. Some of the few places the Goths spared were the two major basilicas connected to Peter and Paul, though from the Lateran Palace they stole a massive, 2,025-pound silver ciborium that had been a gift from Constantine. Structural damage to buildings was largely limited to the areas near the old Senate house and the Salarian Gate, where the Gardens of Sallust were burned and never rebuilt. The Basilica Aemilia and the Basilica Julia were also burned.

The people of Rome were devastated. Many Romans were taken captive, including the Emperor's sister, Galla Placidia. Some citizens would be ransomed, others would be sold into slavery, and still others would be raped and killed. Pelagius, a Roman monk from Britain, survived the siege and wrote an account of the experience in a letter to a young woman named Demetrias.

> *This dismal calamity is but just over, and you yourself are a witness to how Rome that commanded the world was astonished at the alarm of the Gothic trumpet, when that barbarous and victorious nation stormed her walls, and made her way through the breach. Where were then the privileges of birth, and the distinctions of quality? Were not all ranks and degrees leveled at that time and promiscuously huddled together? Every house was then a scene of misery, and equally filled with grief and confusion. The slave and the man of quality were in the same circumstances, and everywhere the terror of death and slaughter was the same, unless we may say the fright made the greatest impression on those who had the greatest interest in living.*

Many Romans were tortured into revealing the locations of their valuables. One was the 85-year-old Saint Marcella, who had no hidden gold as she lived in pious poverty. She was a close friend of St. Jerome, and he detailed the incident in a letter to a woman named Principia who had been with Marcella during the sack.

> *When the soldiers entered [Marcella's house] she is said to have received them without any look of alarm; and when they asked her for gold she pointed to her coarse dress to show them that she had no buried treasure. However they would not believe in her self-chosen poverty, but scourged her and beat her with cudgels. She is said to have felt no pain but to have thrown herself at their feet and to have pleaded with tears for you [Principia], that you might not be taken from her, or owing to your youth have to endure what she as an old woman had no occasion to fear. Christ softened their hard hearts and even among bloodstained swords natural affection asserted its rights. The barbarians conveyed both you and her to the basilica of the apostle Paul, that you might find there either a place of safety or, if not that, at least a tomb.*

Marcella died of her injuries a few days later.

The sack was nonetheless, by the standards of the age, restrained. There was no general slaughter or wholesale enslavement of the city's inhabitants and the two main basilicas of Peter and Paul were nominated places of sanctuary. Most of the buildings and monuments in the city survived intact, though stripped of their valuables.

Refugees from Rome flooded the province of Africa, as well as Egypt and the East. Some refugees were robbed as they sought asylum, and St. Jerome wrote that Heraclian, the Count of Africa, sold some of the young refugees into Eastern brothels.

> *Who would believe that Rome, built up by the conquest of the whole world, had collapsed, that the mother of nations had become also their tomb; that the shores of the whole East, of Egypt, of Africa, which once belonged to the imperial city, were filled with the hosts of her men-servants and maid-servants, that we should every day be receiving in this holy Bethlehem men and women who once were noble and abounding in every kind of wealth but are now reduced to poverty? We cannot relieve these sufferers: all we can do is to sympathize with them, and unite our tears with theirs. [...] There is not a single hour, nor a single moment, in which we are not relieving crowds of brethren, and the quiet of the monastery has been changed into the bustle of a guest house. And so much is this the case that we must either close our doors, or abandon the study of the Scriptures on which we depend for keeping the doors open. [...] Who could boast when the flight of the people of the West, and the holy places, crowded as they are with penniless fugitives, naked and wounded, plainly reveal the ravages of the Barbarians? We cannot see what has occurred, without tears and moans. Who would have believed that mighty Rome, with its careless security of wealth, would be reduced to such extremities as to need shelter, food, and clothing? And yet, some are so hard-hearted and cruel that, instead of showing compassion, they break up the rags and bundles of the captives, and expect to find gold about those who are nothing more than prisoners.*

The historian Procopius records a story where, on hearing the news that Rome had "perished", Honorius was initially shocked, thinking the news was in reference to a favorite chicken he had named "Rome" (Latin, Roma):

> *At that time they say that the Emperor Honorius in Ravenna received the message from one of the eunuchs, evidently a keeper of the poultry, that Rome had perished. And he cried out and said, 'And yet it has just eaten from my hands!' For he had a very large cock, Rome by name; and the eunuch comprehending his words said that it was the city of Rome which had perished at the hands of Alaric, and the emperor with a sigh of relief answered quickly: 'But I thought that my fowl Rome had perished.' So great, they say, was the folly with which this emperor was possessed.*

After three days of looting and pillage, Alaric quickly left Rome and headed for southern Italy. He took with him the wealth of the city and a valuable hostage, Galla Placidia, the sister of emperor Honorius. The Visigoths ravaged Campania, Lucania, and Calabria. Nola and perhaps Capua were sacked, and the Visigoths threatened to invade Sicily and Africa. However, they were unable to cross the Strait of Messina as the ships they had gathered were wrecked by a storm. Alaric died of illness at Consentia in late 410, mere months after the sack. According to legend, he was buried with his treasure by slaves in the bed of the Busento river. The slaves were then killed to hide its location. The Visigoths elected Ataulf, Alaric's brother-in-law, as their new king. The Visigoths then moved north, heading for Gaul. Ataulf married Galla Placidia in 414, but he died one year later. The Visigoths established the Visigothic Kingdom in southwestern Gaul in 418, and they would go on to help the Western Roman Empire fight Attila the Hun at the Battle of the Catalaunian Fields in 451.

The Visigothic invasion of Italy caused land taxes to drop anywhere from one-fifth to one-ninth of their pre-invasion value in the affected provinces. Aristocratic munificence, the local support of public buildings and monuments by the upper classes, ended in south-central Italy after the sack and pillaging of those regions. Using the number of people on the food dole as a guide, Bertrand Lançon estimates the city of Rome's total population fell from 800,000 in 408 to 500,000 by 419.

This was the first time the city of Rome had been sacked in almost 800 years, and it had revealed the Western Roman Empire's increasing vulnerability and military weakness. It was shocking to people across both halves of the Empire who viewed Rome as the eternal city and the symbolic heart of their empire. The Eastern Roman Emperor Theodosius II declared three days of mourning in Constantinople. St. Jerome wrote in grief, "If Rome can perish, what can be safe?" In Bethlehem, he detailed his shock in the preface to his commentary on Ezekiel.

> *[...] intelligence was suddenly brought me of the death of Pammachius and Marcella, the siege of Rome, and the falling asleep of many of my brethren and sisters. I was so stupefied and dismayed that day and night I could think of nothing but the welfare of the community; it seemed as though I was sharing the captivity of the saints, and I could not open my lips until I knew something more definite; and all the while, full of anxiety, I was wavering between hope and despair, and was torturing myself with the misfortunes of other people. But when the bright light of all the world was put out, or, rather, when the Roman Empire was decapitated, and, to speak more correctly, the whole world perished in one city, 'I became dumb and humbled myself, and kept silence from good words, but my grief broke out afresh, my heart glowed within me, and while I meditated the fire was kindled.'*

The Roman Empire at this time was still in the midst of religious conflict between pagans and Christians. The sack was used by both sides to bolster their competing claims of divine legitimacy. Paulus Orosius, a Christian priest and theologian, believed the sack was God's wrath against a proud and blasphemous city, and that it was only through God's benevolence that the sack had not been too severe. Rome had lost its wealth, but Roman sovereignty endured, and that to talk to the survivors in Rome one would think "nothing had happened." Other Romans felt the sack was divine punishment for turning away from the traditional pagan gods to Christ. Zosimus, a Roman pagan historian, believed that Christianity, through its abandonment of the ancient traditional rites, had weakened the Empire's political virtues, and that the poor decisions of the Imperial government that led to the sack were due to the lack of the gods' care.

The religious and political attacks on Christianity spurred Saint Augustine to write a defense, The City of God, which went on to become foundational to Christian thought.

The sack was a culmination of many terminal problems facing the Western Roman Empire. Domestic rebellions and usurpations weakened the Empire in the face of external invasions. These factors would permanently harm the stability of the Roman Empire in the west. The Roman army meanwhile became increasingly barbarian and disloyal to the Empire. A more severe sack of Rome by the Vandals followed in 455, and the Western Roman Empire finally collapsed in 476 when the Germanic Odovacer removed the last Western Roman Emperor, Romulus Augustulus, and declared himself King of Italy.

AFTERMATH

Not only had Rome's sack been a significant blow to the Roman people's morale, they had also endured two years' worth of trauma brought about by fear, hunger (due to blockades), and illness. However, the Goths were not long in the city of Rome, as only three days after the sack, Alaric marched his men south to Campania, from where he intended to sail to Sicily—probably to obtain grain and other supplies—when a storm destroyed his fleet. During the early months of 411, while on his northward return journey through Italy, Alaric took ill and died at Consentia in Bruttium. His cause of death was likely fever, and his body was, according to legend, buried under the riverbed of the Busento in accordance with the pagan practices of the Visigothic people. The stream was temporarily turned aside from its course while the grave was dug, wherein the Gothic chief and some of his most precious spoils were interred. When the work was finished, the river was turned back into its usual channel and the captives by whose hands the labour had been accomplished were put to death that none might learn their secret.

Alaric was succeeded in the command of the Gothic army by his brother-in-law, Ataulf, who married Honorius' sister Galla Placidia three years later. Following in the wake of Alaric's leadership, which Kulikowski claims, had given his people "a sense of community that survived his own death...Alaric's Goths remained together inside the empire, going on to settle in Gaul. There, in the province of Aquitaine, they put down roots and created the first autonomous barbarian kingdom inside the frontiers of the Roman empire." The Goths were able to settle in Aquitaine only after Honorius granted the once Roman province to them, sometime in 418 or 419. Not long after Alaric's exploits in Rome and Athaulf's settlement in Aquitaine, there is a "rapid emergence of Germanic barbarian groups in the West" who begin controlling many western provinces. These barbarian peoples included: Vandals in Spain and Africa, Visigoths in Spain and Aquitaine, Burgundians along the upper Rhine and southern Gaul, and Franks on the lower Rhine and in northern and central Gaul.

SOURCES

The chief authorities on the career of Alaric are: the historian Orosius and the poet Claudian, both contemporary, neither disinterested; Zosimus, a historian who lived probably about half a century after Alaric's death; and Jordanes, a Goth who wrote the history of his nation in 551, basing his work on Cassiodorus's Gothic History.